Ford Madox Ford's "Cold Pastoral": *The Last Post*

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Abstract

The essay discusses the last volume of Ford Madox Ford's tetralogy *Parade's End* (1924-28). As Andrew Hampson and Robert Purssell highlight, whether *The Last Post* is an integral part of the tetralogy has been heavily debated since Graham Greene decided to publish the 1963 edition of the 'Tietjens Saga' as a trilogy. As they go on to explain, a major charge against the volume is "tying up too neatly various loose ends" (2013). Indeed, *The Last Post* seems to call for an interpretation in the pastoral tradition, which suggests that Ford's novel—especially in comparison with Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* (1918)—ends in an idyll even if it is not free from certain ironies inherent in pastoral literature, as Seamus O'Malley (2007) maintains. In my view, on closer scrutiny, these ironies fundamentally undermine the "too neat" ending of the tetralogy. Haunted by the aftereffects of war and the ghosts of Mark's, Christopher's and Valentine's former selves, dissolving identities not only by decentering but also by doubling, this apparent idyll far too often offers glimpses of its own Gothic alter ego, a narrative of madness, imprisonment and disintegration. Yet, as consistent readings of the novel in the pastoral mode imply, the Gothic double never fully takes over but, in my interpretation, subverts the superficial idyll of *The Last Post,* and with that, fully optimistic interpretations of the entire tetralogy.

Keywords: pastoral, *Bildungsroman,* Gothic, irony, subversion

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Although Ford Madox Ford is having a Renaissance and *Parade's End* (1924-28), his tetralogy about the Great War, has more or less achieved canonical status, its critical reception—and especially the assessment of the fourth volume, *The Last Post* (1928)—is still fraught with controversies. As recently as 2015, Paul K. Saint-Amour could still write about the "broad dismissal" of *Parade's End* and his own reading of it in terms of highly experimental encyclopaedic fiction, to be discussed on a par with *Ulysses* (1922) or *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), as going against the "critical consensus." In his view, central to the accepted understanding of the tetralogy is the impression that it fails to fulfil its own promises by never following through the experimental solutions it sporadically features (268). Saint-Amour, in turn, sees especially in these features, 'failures' to be consistent, moreover, the key to what Vincent Sherry terms Ford's "counter-conventional" approach (qtd. in Saint-Amour 280) to the traumatic experience of the first total war. In Saint-Amour's view, by offering a

fragmented and impressionistic encyclopaedia of genres and narrative techniques,[1] including traditional nineteenth-century modes of writing, Ford rejects and resists the "coherentist" urge of literature (Saint-Amour 277-281) in representing what T. S. Eliot in his famous *Ulysses* review calls "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (483). It is in this context that Saint-Amour takes a firm stance in the heated debate still surrounding *The Last Post* and argues that, let alone being "a disaster which has delayed a full critical appreciation of *Parade's End*" (Graham Greene qtd. in Saint-Amour 294),[2] the last volume might actually be the most experimental among the four:

> *Last Post* is the tetralogy's most counter-conventional volume in retreating from the world stage and in trading the central observer for a decentered ensemble. [...] Its opening is focalized through Mark Tietjens, silent and confined to his bed on a terrace overlooking four counties. Dodging in and out of narrative registers from omniscient third-person to free indirect discourse to interior monologue, subsequent chapters shift to [various minor characters]. [...] Where the flickering experimentalism of the earlier volumes glimpsed a series of stylistically and generically alternative tetralogies, *Last Post*'s rapid handoffs in point of view make protagonism itself subjunctive. (296–297)

Nonetheless, *The Last Post* might create the impression of a "paradise regained [that] betray[s] [...] the rest of the tetralogy" (Saint-Amour 294), which suggests that its duly noted affinities with the pastoral tradition are a prime cause for its apparent conventionality: an overly happy ending that glosses over the disaster of the Great War far too easily. Ford's novel—especially in comparison with Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* (1918), as Seamus O'Malley's comparative study demonstrates—seemingly ends in an idyll, even if it is not free from ironies inherent to pastoral

1 For detailed analyses of Ford's narrative technique in *Parade's End* and especially its connection with shell shock see (Bonikowski 57–94; Haslam, *Fragmenting* 84-117).

2 It is a commonplace in Ford criticism that the status of *The Last Post*—whether it is an integral part of the tetralogy or not—has been heavily debated since Graham Greene decided to publish the 1963 Bodley Head edition of the 'Tietjens Saga' as a trilogy. As the editors of the recent Wordsworth omnibus edition explain, a major issue with the volume is "tying up too neatly various loose ends"—a charge of artistic inferiority which seems to be confirmed by Ford's own (hesitant) withdrawal of *The Last Post* from the tetralogy (Hampson and Purssell; cf. Saint-Amour 294–295; Christensen 22). As Saint-Amour also notes, popular culture, namely the recent 2012 BBC miniseries adaptation of the 'Tietjens Saga,' corroborates this critical assessment (295). Dropping the fourth volume, Tom Stoppard's critically acclaimed screenplay does not simply replace a "too neat" ending with an open one—the celebration on Armistice Day at the end of Ford's third volume, *A Man Could Stand Up*—but also exchanges an idyll too clearly haunted by the Great War for the hope of full regeneration. The detailed interpretation of Stoppard's solution falls beyond the scope of the present study. One of Ford's most fervent admirers, though, who would clearly go against the "critical consensus" evoked by Saint-Amour above—and would "never forgive [Greene] for omitting the fourth and final volume of the *Parade's End* series" (Mill 219)—was Anthony Burgess. In a 1980 essay he insisted that *Parade's End* was not only "the finest novel about the First World War," but also "about the nature of British society" (Burgess qtd. in Mill 219).

literature.[3] Thus, *The Last Post* as an ending suggests an optimistic reading of the tetralogy (O'Malley 156) in which Tietjens is "liberated by the war" (O'Malley 159) to be symbolically reborn from the mud of the trenches and to undergo a positive transformation (O'Malley 162), much in accordance with the patterns of the *Bildungsroman* (see Christensen 19).

In my view, upon closer scrutiny the ironies of *The Last Post* prove to be too grave to be compatible with pastoral literature and are instrumental to the effect that the fourth volume is indeed "irreducible to the element of nostalgic pastoral" (Saint-Amour 298). These ironies include Valentine Wannop's subjugation in an apparently fully patriarchal relationship with Christopher Tietjens and her abandonment of feminist ideals, the lingering effects of Christopher Tietjens' shell shock, the paralysed and muted Mark Tietjens' assumption of the central role in the novel, and the deferral of Christopher's own utopian dream to an indefinite future in Valentine's wishful thinking about her unborn son. Haunted by the aftereffects of war and ghosts of Mark's, Christopher's and Valentine's former selves, dissolving identities not only by decentering but also by doubling, this apparent idyll far too often offers glimpses of its own Gothic alter ego, a narrative of madness, imprisonment and disintegration. Yet—(to return to Saint-Amour)—Ford's resistance to "coherentist" urges is also clearly traceable in his balancing between these two modes: as consistent readings of the novel in the pastoral mode imply, the Gothic double never fully takes over, but—in my view—subverts the superficial idyll of *The Last Post* and with that, fully optimistic interpretations of the entire tetralogy.[4]

Valentine Wannop: From Blue Stockings to Pink Silk

The core of Ford's presumably simplistic solution is the apparently idyllic fulfilment of Christopher Tietjens' affair with Valentine Wannop in a bucolic environment: after many years of longing and frustrated desire, *The Last Post* features the pair set up in rural England years after the Great War, and Valentine expecting their first-born. Valentine's radical transformation in the fourth volume, however, undermines this idyll in a disturbing manner: the ironic contrast of her present and former selves might make one wonder whether the term fulfilment is relevant at all to her career, her relationship with Tietjens, and the large-scale symbolic promises both held out during the war.

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3 Relying on Annabel Patterson, O'Malley speaks of "pastoral's inherent irony," which resides in the fact that "suggestions of war and battle have always been implicit in the pastoral mode" (159).

4 The effect is thus similar to what Nick Hubble calls "Ford's parallax view." Hubble associates the parallax shift—the revelation of "the object's non-coincidence with itself" through a shift of perspective—with "ironical humility," the simultaneous exaggeration and rejection of social rank and distances (170-171), in Ford's novels, including *Parade's End* (185–186). The present analysis rather identifies ironic twists or ironies of fate, yet their effect—the maintenance of a double vision—seems to be strikingly similar to what Hubble, and indeed, Saint-Amour, hold to be central to Ford's experimental writing. In ascribing a definitive role to the last volume of *Parade's End* in the interpretation of the entire tetralogy, I rely on Peter Brooks' critical insights advanced in *Reading for the Plot* (especially 3-36), which assert that narratives are interpreted retrospectively, in the light of their ending.

In fact, Valentine's transformation is so conspicuous that it could not go unnoticed among Ford scholars. Isabel Brasme's interpretation of the tetralogy's female characters is a case in point: she follows the trajectory of Valentine's transformation from a "torchbearer for social and political autonomy" (173) in the first three volumes into an "epigone" of the Angel in the House (179) in *The Last Post.* Indeed, as Christopher Tietjens' interior monologue suggests right upon their first acquaintance, it is Valentine's being a "militant" feminist (Ford) that largely makes her Christopher's intellectual partner and love interest, his "feminine counterpart" (Brasme 178). This proposition—together with the lingering but finally dissolved suspicion that they might be half-siblings—even connotes narcissistic overtones to his infatuation:

> Then thank God for the upright young man and the virtuous maiden in the summer fields: he Tory of the Tories as he should be: she suffragette of the militants: militant here on earth . . . as she should be! [...] Thank God then for the Tory, upright young married man and the suffragette kid . . . Backbone of England! (Ford, ellipsis in the original)

As Tietjens' last exclamation implies, the fact that Valentine is a positive embodiment of New Womanhood (see Flanagan 37)[5] throughout their unfulfilled romance is also key to the pair's role as trustees of England's future in Ford's condition of England novel.[6] In stark contrast to Sylvia's stereotypically oversexualized, predatory, *femme fatale*-like femininity,[7] Valentine's agency is both shown to be continuous with proto-feminist ideals of womanhood voiced by Mary Wollstonecraft (Brasme 177), and in its modernity essential for a break with the codes of Victorian patriarchal society, which she—along with Ford (Saint-Amour 286-287)—holds responsible for the apocalypse of the First World War (Brasme 176). Therefore, in my view, both her transformation and its implications deserve closer scrutiny: the disappearance of the first three volume's Valentine from *The Last Post* both disrupts the illusion of idyll and undermines the utopian resolution to the condition of England question that such an idyll entails.

Though Sally Ledger's claim that the New Woman was largely a "discursive phenomenon" (3) has acquired much currency, as for instance, Tracy Collins notes, it does not—and should not—stop critics from recognising New Woman characters in *fin de siècle* fiction (309). Collins provides a list of the well-known features by which this "abstraction" can be identified (310), but I would rather refrain from quoting it: Valentine fits the bill so perfectly that her description can effectively replace Collins' list. Being a professor's daughter, Valentine is well-educated and ready to use her

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5 Here I beg to differ from Brasme, who interprets Sylvia Tietjens' violent quest for agency, though with major reservations, in the context of New Womanhood (180-184).

6 For an analysis and critique of Ford's tetralogy as a condition of England novel see (Christensen passim).

7 Though Ford's support of the suffragette movement is well-known and even allows Brasme to call him a feminist (175), his often pointed out conflation of the war conflict with the domestic one (for instance Saint-Amour 287-289) and casting Sylvia as the villain pulling the strings in both—almost a power of pure, arbitrary evil—appears to be most incongruous with a feminist stance.

intelligence to secure her financial independence—though she does not shy away from manual labour to provide for those dependent on her, either. Thus, she works as a writer's assistant, as a teacher, even as a maid, becoming the breadwinner of her family in the war years. She pointedly seems to have no concern with appearances, as Brasme also highlights (174), and is consistently represented as being highly intelligent. Nevertheless, her athletic body—the body the New Woman gained from *Punch* in the last two decades of the nineteenth century (Collins 310)—and bobbed hair also make her decidedly attractive. Her New Woman-like search for "freedom and equality with men" (Collins 310) is conspicuously reflected in her disregard for gendered separate spheres: she is consistently associated with open and public (male) spaces (Brasme 175) and behaviours. This is best exemplified by her spectacular entry into the novel's world in the shape of a militant suffragette crashing a golf course and negotiating a ditch by a superb long jump when chased by a comically unfit police officer. Her involvement in politics—and the women's rights movement, at that—is in itself a rebellion against patriarchal norms of passive femininity (see Brasme 176) and a transgression of the separate spheres divide. Her oppositional attitude is further aggravated by the pacifist political stance Valentine takes during the war years permeated by patriotic propaganda (see Brasme 177). In short, as Tietjens' "feminine counterpart," the first three volumes' Valentine Wannop holds out a promise of a post-war future that breaks with the patriarchal system at the root cause of war—and thereby establishes a utopia in which no further wars are possible.[8]

In my view, it is in this context that the implications of Valentine's transformation—and its Gothic overtones—gain their full significance. To start with, it is hard to disagree with Brasme's above-quoted insight according to which in the one-chapter Valentine's stream of consciousness takes up in *The Last Post*; she makes the impression of wholeheartedly returning to Victorian models of femininity, though she remains painfully conscious of her inadequacy in doing so. This divorce from her earlier self surfaces in a number of ways. First of all, in contrast to her earlier freedom and transgression into open spaces, she now appears to be mentally entrapped in the feminine sphere, which is yet emphatically controlled by masculine power. Her thoughts now seem to revolve exclusively, obsessively and at the same time claustrophobically around household matters: the house itself, housekeeping, farming, the costs of living and their financial constraints are all she can think of. This pattern is broken only when she refocuses on the men who, even in their absence, dominate her life: Christopher and their unborn son, Chrissie. Her relapse to Victorian patterns of thought is best demonstrated by her desire solidified into the conviction that she should have a son and thereby continue the male lineage of the Tietjens family. The self-denial implicit here explicitly appears in a buffalo metaphor for the Tietjenses, which connotes her complete and voluntary subjugation to energetic, but

8 Saint-Amour—quoting Ford himself—identifies this as the "tetralogy's central aim": "I have always had the greatest contempt for novels written with a purpose. Fiction should render and not draw morals. But, when I sat down to write that series of volumes, I sinned against my gods to the extent of saying that I was going—to the level of the light vouchsafed me—to write a work that should have for its purpose the obviating of all future wars" (270).

also aggressive, potentially even toxic masculinity. Indeed, her major concern is that such masculinity should be sustained: "living with Tietjenses. It was like being tied to buffaloes! And yet . . . How you wanted them to charge!" (Ford, ellipsis in the original). Secondly, regardless of her complete conformation to traditional feminine models—or rather because of it—insecurity becomes a new constant of Valentine's character. Thus, for instance, self-reproach on her inferiority to her sister-in-law, Marie Léonie, a self-satisfied impossible mixture of French lover turned into lady-*cum*-nurse-*cum*-perfect housewife, obsessively surfaces in Valentine's thoughts. For one thing, as she recalls, "as Marie Léonie had perforce taken over the housekeeping [when Valentine's pregnancy became apparent], they had found things easing off a little. Marie Léonie had run the house for thirty shillings a week less than she, Valentine, had ever been able to do—and run it streets better. Streets and streets!" (Ford). Also, the once careless blue stocking now feels pressured to conform to the stereotypical feminine model of commodity culture, the object of male desire who sustains her desirability through expensive purchases: "Marie Léonie was of opinion that she would lose Christopher if she did not deluge herself with a perfume called Houbigant and wear pink silk next the skin" (Ford). Though this advice is voiced by her sister-in-law—a French woman stereotypically better versed in issues of gender and femininity—the epitome of this feminine ideal is Sylvia herself (cf. Brasme 181). Is Valentine becoming a faint shadow of her archenemy, the feminine model she used to detest and still fears? She is constantly worried by not being legally wedded to Christopher and thus usurping the name Mrs. Tietjens for the sake of decency, to the point of apologising to Sylvia for being called Mrs. Tietjens to her face, which again suggests a sense of inferiority and insecurity. These feelings are intertwined with a third major change in Valentine: she is forced into a passivity diametrically opposed to her earlier activity, for which her condition is both a cause and an excuse. Thus, she feels remorse for not standing up for Christopher in the case of Groby Great Tree: "Well, she had been run down . . . At that stage of parturition, call it, a woman is run down and hysterical" (Ford, ellipsis in the original). Indeed, Valentine enters the scene in *The Last Post*—in stark contrast to the athletic figure in *Some Do Not...*—on the note of mental and physical frailty, which is only apparently explained away by her pregnancy. At the beginning of her stream-of-consciousness chapter she is, quite symbolically, woken to the reality of a potentially disastrous day—the uninvited visit of Sylvia and her company—from a passive daytime slumber, feeling "dizzy and sickish with the change of position and the haste—and violently impatient of her condition" (Ford). Yet, her weakness seems to be rooted rather in her general insecurity caused by living in an extramarital relationship and the social stigma it entails. As she mentally puts it, she is living "in open sin" (Ford). All in all, if Valentine used to be a "feminine counterpart" to Tietjens, almost his incestuous double, her transformation into a faint shadow of her former self suggests not idyllic fulfilment, but disintegration, not *Bildung,* but "an anti-*Bildungsroman*, a novel which involves the forfeiture rather than consolidation of the protagonist's self" (Marais 79).

Actually, the frail and troubled, passively confined Valentine of *The Last Post* is just as much reminiscent of the Angel in the House as her Gothic double, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's well-known concept of the madwoman in the attic. Valentine

seems to be almost paranoidly shy of her condition: not only does she regard all customers coming to their house as "intruders," but her fears are also tainted by the supernatural: "You never knew who was coming. It was eerie; at times she shivered over it. You seemed to be beset—with stealthy people, creeping up all the paths" (Ford). Feeling relatively safe only in the house, she becomes an "embodiment of the doctrine of 'separate spheres'" (Brasme 179) by keeping to her first-floor bedroom—if not an attic, certainly a room at the top that has "a barrel-shaped ceiling, following the lines of the roof almost up to the roof-tree" (Ford). Her self-afflicted confinement—she accidentally locks herself in the room and is unable to get out for a while to call for help for the dying Mark—is on the one hand strongly reminiscent of pregnant women's traditional seclusion in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England. On the other hand, her constant anxieties and voluntary imprisonment recall the marriage environment of eighteenth-century women, the one that—according to Tania Modleski's insight—provided a fertile soil for "delusions of persecution" and emergent Gothic fantasies and literature (55). This sense of Valentine's mental instability is further strengthened when, as a faint reminder of her former activity and self-reliance, she finally, after much struggle with lock and key, manages to get out of her room and call the doctor: she is just as much concerned about Mark's well-being as getting a mild sedative (bromide) for herself. Is she an addict, a caged wild animal who is able to cope with her situation only in chemically induced stupor? Indeed, Valentine's mental state, taken together with her past and present transgressions on patriarchal norms, contextualise her present predicament as patriarchal society's punishment for her rebellion, only at one remove from the forced imprisonment of the monstrous madwoman (Gilbert and Gubar 79), a *topos* of the Gothic tradition (Gilbert and Gubar 83-84). Her acceptance of her situation—or rather, her complicity in it, as the above-quoted buffalo metaphor suggests—gestures towards the acceptance of female identity centred around (self-)victimisation in male Gothic (see Kilgour 37-38). Even her confrontation with Sylvia ends in a Gothic cliché: like the classic persecuted heroine who would faint at the smallest shock (Botting 42), she helplessly "fell straight down on to the ground, lumpishly!" (Ford).

Thus, the Valentine of *The Last Post* suggests anything but the utopian idyll of going beyond the patriarchal system and the large-scale destruction coded in its mechanisms. Conversely, the volume leaves her in a state of full regression to patriarchal patterns of thought and traditional models of femininity, suffocating to the point of evoking, in tandem with the motifs of incest and usurpation (see Botting 3–4), the male Gothic as a hitherto ignored facet of generic versatility in *Parade's End*. Indeed, it is a fitting dark counterpart to both the superficial pastoral idyll of *The Last Post* and the often-mentioned eighteenth-century ideals of reason Tietjens to a great extent embodies (see Haslam, "Conversation" passim).

The Tietjenses: Shell Shock and Paralysis

If Valentine's transformation is a bitterly ironic turn in *Parade's End* which subverts the apparent idyll of *The Last Post* and concomitant readings of the entire tetralogy in

terms of Christopher Tietjens' completed *Bildung*, the same holds true for the (non-) representation of the two brothers Tietjens in the same volume.

As far as Christopher is concerned, the long shadow of the Great War is present in the form of the lingering effects of his shell shock.[9] This, in turn, puts into question the narrative of his straightforward *Bildung,* especially the notion that it features his unambiguous rebirth. As Valentine's worried thoughts about Christopher reveal, they live under the constant threat of his relapse into illness, a protracted mental breakdown: "You couldn't cut down Groby Great Tree. But the thought that the tree was under the guardianship of unsympathetic people would be enough to drive Christopher almost dotty[10]—for years and years" (Ford). In fact, the conflict over Groby Great Tree—and all it symbolises—has already shaken Christopher's mental balance, to the extent of triggering nightmares, a typical though not differential symptom of shell shock (see Leese 95) and a reminder of his painful past condition: "It is true that he was almost out of his mind about Groby and Groby Great Tree. He had begun to talk about that in his sleep, as for years, at times, he had talked, dreadfully, about the war" (Ford). Valentine's concern about Christopher's threatened masculinity, implied only in the buffalo metaphor, elsewhere appears in explicit form, much in accordance with the often-noted feminising effect of shell shock (Juliet Mitchell and Pat Barker qtd. in Haslam, *Fragmenting* 99-100): "And you have to think whether it is worse for the unborn child to have a mother with unsatisfied longings, or a father [...] lacking masculinity" (Ford). The latter excerpt does not simply indicate an unfulfilled desire at the core of *The Last Post*, an ailment that is inconsistent with full recovery from the war's effects. What is more, it posits that lack as potentially detrimental to the future generations, suggesting that the war left indelible scars on its victims, which they might transmit, like some infection, to their descendants. Just as Valentine's femininity and mental stability are threatened in *The Last Post,* so are the same aspects of Christopher's identity, which precludes the acceptance of his successful *Bildung* or bucolic idyll at face value.

The above-mentioned lack undermining the straightforward, optimistic narrative of Tietjens' *Bildung* and rebirth also surfaces as Christopher's almost complete absence from *The Last Post.* Conceding Saint-Amour's point that the disappearance of the (former) main character questions the very notion of protagonism, I suggest

9 As is well-known, *Parade's End* can be considered therapeutic writing in the sense that it helped Ford work through his own shell shock, on which Tietjens's experience is modelled (Bonikowski 57; Hampson and Purssell; Haslam, *Fragmenting* 103–104). It is present in the novel as a conspicuous gap, in accordance with the amnesia it brought about for both author and character. According to Wyatt Bonikowski's Freudian analysis of the tetralogy, what Randall Stevenson elsewhere calls Ford's "anachronous narrative tactics" seem to be rooted in trauma: "Ford [...] offers us an idea of wartime as a traumatic temporality that affects past, present, and future. [...] Ford's narrative technique of leaping ahead in time in order to fill in what has been leaped over through the fractured perspectives of characters reinforces the effect of [his] patterning of figures and associations" (80).

10 Dotty is a word consistently used in the previous volumes as a synonym of mad and, especially to allude to mentally disturbed shell-shocked soldiers, as in "He had been trying the old trick of the military, clipped voice on the half-dotty subject. It had before then reduced McKechnie to some sort of military behaviour" or "If a fellow, half dotty, whose record showed that he was a very good man, was brought to his notice Campion would do what he could for him" (Ford).

an alternative Gothic reading of his replacement. That is, the place of the patriarch Christopher leaves empty in this strange ghost of a Victorian household is apparently taken by his mysteriously ailing, vegetating brother, Mark, which in itself establishes Mark as Christopher's double (see Dolar 11-14). Though Saint-Amour speaks of a character ensemble in the focus of *The Last Post*, Mark seems to be more equal among equals in the sense that his extended thought processes open *The Last Post* and take up a large section of it, while his death—complete with the conventional 'famous last words' in the form of his warning and legacy to future generations—closes the novel. The impression of his replacing Christopher is underpinned by numerous similarities between the two male characters, which point towards doubling—a symptom of insecure identity in the Gothic tradition. Some of these common features are rooted in their being brothers: as John Attridge demonstrates, they have the same codes propagated through public school mentality and the stereotypical English stiff upper lip (passim, especially 27-28),[11] as well as a similarly stubborn mentality indicated by the above-quoted buffalo metaphor, which pertains to both of them. These apparently insignificant similarities gain special importance in the light of the two men's shared fate: though both conduct and extramarital affair, it is Mark, who, as doubles would (see Dolar 11), fulfils Christopher's central desire by legalising his affair with his own mistress. Just as importantly, the two brothers mirror each other in suffering from the long-term effects of the war: while Christopher is tortured by the lingering symptoms of shell shock, Mark was mysteriously paralysed on Armistice Day, so his present immobility and muteness appear to be caused by the war. The symptoms themselves, being also typical of shell shock (Bonikowski 2-7; Leese 39), might be interpreted as an exaggeration of Christopher's own condition, which turns Mark into an embodiment of an alternative fate for Christopher—something that could have happened to him—or into a projection of Christopher's shell-shocked present mental and spiritual state. Even the misunderstandings surrounding Mark's disease—as he mentally puts it, he is taken for "a syphilitic member of an effete aristocracy" (Ford)—connect him with ex-servicemen, whose ailments were often mistakenly and maliciously put down to syphilis (Leese 34). At the same time, Mark's mental comment epitomises him as the remnant of a bygone era and class, a ghost of the past and himself. The concomitant spectrality is yet another essential feature that Mark and Christopher share, since actually both of them are absent from the narrative in one sense or another: though physically there, Mark is unable to communicate with his environment, while Christopher physically withdraws himself from the household, only to haunt Valentine's thoughts unstoppably. Ultimately, Mark, just like Christopher's narrative and thereby Christopher himself, seems to be dependent for his life on Sylvia's violence: his will to live leaves him when deprived of that impetus. As he mentally puts it, "Well, if Sylvia had come to that [initiating divorce], his, Mark's

11 John Attridge describes only Christopher Tietjens in these terms. Nonetheless, he acknowledges a "silent accord" between the brothers and quotes the following passage from *The Last Post*—an excerpt that highlights the uncanny similarity rather than simple understanding between the siblings: "Over Boswell the two brothers had got as thick as thieves with an astonishing intimacy—and with an astonishing similarity. If one of them made a comment on Bennet Langton it would be precisely the comment that the other had on his lips. It was what asses call telepathy, nowadays" (Ford qtd. in Attridge 34).

occupation was gone. He would no longer have to go on willing against her" (Ford). Such a contextualisation of his death also indicates that he takes a central role in the narrative instead of Christopher and thus replaces him in the manner of a double: in contrast to the previous volumes, the antagonists in the conflict over Christopher's divorce and all it stands for are him and Sylvia in *The Last Post.* Envisioning Mark and Christopher as ghostly doubles, however, entails that Mark's self-willed death at the close of *The Last Post* provides Christopher's narrative with an alternative ending, fully incompatible with the superficial idyll of regeneration and successful *Bildung*: the shell-shocked soldier never recovers and the apparent plenty of utopia fails to gloss over for long the jarring abysses of loss and desire, which mar even the prospects of a brighter future.

Instead of a Conclusion: Deferred Pastoral

I hope to have demonstrated that the apparent conventionality of *The Last Post*, which is rooted in its conspicuous reliance on the pastoral tradition, is undermined and complicated by bitterly ironic turns in the two major characters' fate and representation. Far from being a simplistic and *per se* inferior culmination of *Parade's End*, the volume in fact contributes to the tetralogy's generic versatility: its Gothic overtones are instrumental to subverting the apparent pastoral idyll and providing the tetralogy with an ambiguous ending. Though Ford carefully maintains a fragile equilibrium between the two diametrically opposed visions—that of a superficial pastoral idyll and an underlying Gothic vision of extinction (see Saint-Amour 271)—the deferral of Christopher's dream of a resurrected bucolic past to an indefinite future sums up the impossibility of the task the condition of England novel poses in the aftermath of the Great War:

> Oh God, she ought to lie between lavendered linen sheets with little Chrissie on soft, pink silk, air-cushionish bosoms! . . . Little Chrissie, descended from surgeon-butler—surgeon-barber, to be correct! —and burgomaster. Not to mention the world-famous Professor Wannop . . . Who was to become . . . who was to become, if it was as she wished it . . . But she did not know what she wished, because she did not know what was to become of England or the world . . . But if he became what Christopher wished he would be a contemplative parson farming his own tithe-fields and with a Greek Testament in folio under his arm . . . A sort of White of Selborne . . . Selborne was only thirty miles away, but they had had never the time to go there . . . [...] And Christopher looking on . . . He would never find time to go to Selborne, or Arundel, or Carcassonne, or after the Strange Woman . . . Never. Never! (Ford, ellipsis in the original)

Thus, in Valentine's thoughts, it is now Chrissie's future and not their own existence that is to realise Christopher's ideal of perfection, modelled on eighteenth-century modes of life: the emphatically repeated "never" signals absolute closure, Valentine's final giving up on Christopher's ever (re)establishing the identity that kept him

going during his horrible front experience. Yet, as Valentine is careful to make that distinction, her unborn child's hypothetical bucolic life as a parson and, by inference, its being a boy, in the first place, is Christopher's and not her own wish-fulfilment: in the light of the unpredictable future of England and the world, in general, Valentine finds herself unable to chart out a future for her progeny, even at the level of desires. In other words, just as Christopher and Valentine appeared to be the trustees of England's future in the pre-war years, now her unborn child's fate is fully intertwined with—as it were, it is the embodiment of—what is to become of England. Valentine's renunciation, on her own part, of Christopher's bucolic dream is an acknowledgement of the dream's potential irrelevance in a world totally remapped by the Great War. Indeed, she seems to be mourning both Christopher's inability to fulfil his own dream and the loss of a world in which such straightforward, well-defined dreams could be had at all. Catching at last straws in her state of absolute insecurity and disorientation, she apparently finds refuge in Christopher's wishes and their underlying patriarchal discourse because they, as opposed to her own inability to map out a future, at least offer a clearly outlined view. Thus, her thought processes at this point repeat and perform Ford's strategy throughout *The Last Post*: while at first glance they provide a confirmation for a bucolic and patriarchal idyll, life regenerated and celebrated after war's destruction, a more careful reading reveals that apparent confirmation to be haunted by a fearful sense of lack, insecurity and disorientation. In that light, Valentine's—and the novel's—regression to patriarchal discourse, whether in the form of the pastoral or the male Gothic, proves to be a retreat to a well-known and thus relatively safe place from the horror of an unknowable future after the apocalypse of the Great War. Providing a fearfully inadequate, nostalgic answer to the condition of England question, both Valentine and Ford offer an only thinly veiled vision of an even greater horror: having no answer at all.

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